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President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 14 (*continued*)

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/61/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/61/355)

Draft resolutions (A/61/L.31, A/61/L.32, A/61/L.33 and A/61/L.34)

Mr. Sahel (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): I should like first of all to sincerely thank His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji, Permanent Representative of Senegal and Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for the praiseworthy efforts that he has made as head of that Committee.

The Kingdom of Morocco has taken note of the Secretary-General's report on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, and would like to express its deep concern in connection with the pessimistic tone of the report and with the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is preventing the aspirations of the peoples of the region to sustainable peace and socio-economic development from being fulfilled.

The Kingdom of Morocco, which warmly welcomed the withdrawal of Israel from Gaza as a first step towards the creation of a Palestinian State in conformity with the Road Map, denounces the attacks perpetrated by the Israeli army against the occupied Palestinian territories — attacks that have resulted in the deaths of a number of innocent civilians.

The escalating Israeli violence against the Palestinian people and the destruction of the economic and social infrastructure have aroused the indignation of Arab Governments and peoples, and are fuelling the feelings of frustration caused by the inertia of the international community. It is high time that the cycle of violence between the Israelis and Palestinians, which has continued for many years and has intensified over the past few months in an alarming manner, cease immediately and that the parties concerned return to the negotiating table with a view to achieving a peaceful resolution of the conflict. It is also important to put an end to any unilateral measures regarding the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the establishment of a security cordon along the Jordan River Valley. Such unilateral measures, which must be denounced, seriously hinder the implementation of a lasting solution.

The policy of impoverishing the Palestinian people through the confiscation of their property and the suspension of international assistance will only serve to increase tension and further inflame the region. It is therefore essential that Palestinian authorities have sufficient financing available to resume economic activity and relive the suffering of the people through renewed social payments, which have declined significantly since the imposition of the financial embargo.

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Given the failure of various regional and international initiatives to reactivate the peace process and resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Kingdom of Morocco would like to appeal to the international community to assume its responsibility to take steps towards sustainable peace under the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

The Kingdom of Morocco, which currently presides over the Al-Quds Committee, would therefore like to reiterate its principled position regarding the peaceful co-existence of two States — a Palestinian State existing within the 1967 borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital and an Israeli State living side by side in harmony.

In addition, we condemn the building of the wall, which violates the principles of international law, as well as the restrictions imposed against the Palestinian people through the setting up of checkpoints and other obstacles, which both restrict contact between Palestinian families and hinder organizations and United Nations programmes from providing assistance to Palestinians. That alarming situation is a source of major concern for my country.

The Kingdom of Morocco, which welcomed the conclusion, in Gaza on 25 November, of a ceasefire agreement between the Palestinian President and the Israeli Prime Minister, calls for compliance with that agreement. We also reiterate our rejection of any acts of violence against civilians.

The Kingdom of Morocco is following with great interest the ongoing discussions among the different segments of the Palestinian population. We fervently hope that they will lead to the establishment of a Government of national unity that will unite the Palestinian people and meet their aspirations for peace and prosperity and a life of dignity and peace.

We continue to believe that the resumption of negotiations depends upon the existence of genuine political will on the part of the parties. We underscore the need for the international community, and the Quartet in particular, to spare no effort to achieve a resumption of dialogue.

Yesterday, we celebrated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and it is worth recalling that bringing peace to the entire Middle East region depends largely upon a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The only way to achieve such an outcome continues to be negotiations to establish two States living side by side in peace.

Mr. Diab (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, recalling yesterday's celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I should like to reaffirm Lebanon's solidarity with the people of Palestine as they fight for their inalienable rights.

For many years, our delegations have met in this Hall to discuss the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East and to adopt resolutions, most of them by a wide majority, aimed at prompting Israel to cease its arbitrary practices against the Palestinian people and the peoples of the region, as well as to document such practices. To that end, I have chosen a number of statistics that the Secretary-General cited from the report of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in introducing the report to the Economic and Social Council during the current session (A/61/67). Those figures very accurately reflect Israeli practices that cause suffering to the Palestinian people and form part of the draft resolutions we will adopt today.

With regard to Israel's practices in Gaza and the West Bank, the report states that

> "In 2005, 180 Palestinian fatalities and 1,554 injuries were recorded in the West Bank. In the Gaza Strip, 99 Palestinian fatalities and 266 injuries were recorded." (*A/61/67, annex, para. 3*)

The report also states that

> "Since January 2006, some 50 Palestinian children were injured and 11 died owing to the conflict. Civilian casualties are mainly caused by the disproportionate use of force by the Israeli army". (*Ibid.*)

The report goes on to say that, "through the course of its work in 2005, UNRWA recorded a total of 224 Palestinian structures demolished by the Israeli army in the West Bank" (*para. 11*). The Israeli army has also razed 180 hectares of agricultural land in Gaza, and "Israeli forces ... razed 28,882 dunums of agricultural land, uprooting trees and destroying crops belonging to Palestinians and impoverishing 60,101 Palestinians" (*para. 18*).

With regard to material loses, "Physical capital loss in the occupied Palestinian territory is estimated at $3.5 billion, as a result of destruction of private and public infrastructure ..." (*para. 20*), and as to refugees, "Registered refugees form 29 per cent of the West Bank's Palestinian population and 70 per cent of the total Gaza Strip population" (*para. 8*).

With regard to detainees, "Over 9,000 Palestinian political prisoners currently remain in Israeli prisons, including approximately 129 Palestinian women prisoners" (*para. 6*).

With regard to Al-Quds, the report states that

> "At least 60,000 Palestinian residents of occupied East Jerusalem with Israeli identity cards, including 3,600 school-age children, will be closed outside the 'Jerusalem envelope', as the barrier prevents them from reaching the municipal centre. This phenomenon also affects 11,000 persons already separated from their livelihood in the 'closed zone'" (*para. 9*).

Concerning the separation wall, the report states that "The barrier route places approximately 10 per cent of West Bank territory on its west side" (*para. 36*), and that, as a result,

> "According to UNRWA, 10.1 per cent of some of the most fertile Palestinian land, home to approximately 50,000 Palestinians living in 38 communities, is expected to be isolated between the barrier and the Green Line" (*para. 37*).

Those sobering statistics reflect the daily and ongoing suffering that the Palestinian people have been experiencing since the outbreak of the Israeli-Arab conflict almost 50 years ago — suffering caused by the arbitrary Israeli practices carried out against that people. That is exactly the picture painted for us by the Secretary-General in the 2005 ESCWA report entitled "Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan". Indeed, the report accurately reflects the genuine suffering of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories.

The illegal and inhumane Israeli practices carried out against the Palestinian people, which, incidentally, are documented in reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, are the very practices that the General Assembly is trying to prevent today, as it has done each year, through the adoption of draft resolutions such as the one we are considering today under the items relating to the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East.

However, owing to the international community's inability to hold Israel responsible for its actions or to find a just and effective solution to the question of Palestine, Israel continues to defy the international community and the many resolutions adopted by the United Nations, committing ever more violations of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people, the most recent of which is the crime committed by Israel at Beit Hanoun.

The failure of the international community to shoulder its responsibility to put an end to the aggressive policies carried out by Israel led last July to a barbaric and unprecedented act of aggression against Lebanon by Israel, which resulted in thousands of Lebanese dead and wounded, the vast majority of whom were civilians, children in particular. It also resulted in the destruction of tens of thousands of residential units, and of hundreds of bridges, airports, factories and other infrastructures vital to the Lebanese people.

The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan is a source of great concern for the international community, given that Israel has refused to withdraw from the territories that it has been forcibly occupying since 1976 and that it is continuing to attempt to change the demographic and legal nature of the region by establishing new settlements and by imposing its laws on Syrian citizens, in contravention of all relevant United Nations resolutions and principles of international law. Thus the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan will remain yet another source of tension in the region.

In the face of the sombre realities in the region, the international community, especially the great Powers and the United Nations, must seriously assume the responsibility of reviving the Middle East peace process in order to achieve a just and comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict. Achieving peace is the only way to restore stability to the region, stop the bloodshed in Palestine and promote a spirit of moderation. The Arab Peace Initiative, adopted by the Beirut Summit in 2002, reaffirmed that peace is the strategic choice of the Arab people, in the framework

of the faithful implementation of the relevant international resolutions, which would allow the Arabs to recover their land and Arab prisoners and Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and homeland, in keeping with the provisions of resolution 194 (III).

In that context, the proposal made by the Arab Council of Ministers, at its extraordinary meeting held on 12 November last at Cairo, to hold a peace conference with the participation of both sides, Israeli and Arab, and of the permanent members of the Security Council, represents an important step towards the revitalization of the Arab-Israeli negotiations, which we hope will receive proper attention by the international community, with a view to achieving a comprehensive and just solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict on all tracks, in keeping with the relevant international resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, I would like to express our appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people for its report (A/61/35), which provides useful recommendations for the solution to the question of Palestine.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, remains fragile and dangerous. The peace process is now at a standstill. The world community is concerned about the ongoing violence and the disproportionate use of force, which have resulted in a great loss of life and material destruction on an unprecedented scale. In that regard, we urge the parties concerned to stop the violence and all acts likely to increase the tension. Both sides need to exercise maximum restraint, persevere in negotiations and work together towards the implementation of the Quartet's Road Map and of the relevant Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

My delegation believes that a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the conflict can be achieved only on the basis of the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003). In that context, we call on the international community, especially the Quartet, to continue to intensify efforts that would support and promote negotiations between Israel and Palestine, with the aim of achieving a viable, peaceful settlement of the conflict.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic reaffirms its unwavering support for the Palestinian people in their struggle to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination, including the right to create their own independent State of Palestine. We therefore urge that the parties concerned engage in serious dialogue, undertake confidence-building measures, settle their conflict and realize the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders.

We believe that there should be no room for confrontation. Dialogue would bring durable peace and security to all people. The question of Palestine can only be resolved by peaceful means, in accordance with the principle of international law and the United Nations Charter.

Mr. Darwish (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation supports the report of Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We would like to thank him and members of his Committee for the valuable efforts they have made to provide the international community with a true picture of the tragic situation of the Palestinian people, who are languishing under the yoke of occupation. We would also like to associate ourselves with the statement made by Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

A close reading of the reports of the United Nations Secretary-General, as well as the monthly briefing he has presented to the Security Council and the statements made by States members and non-members of the Council in the longest and oldest dispute inscribed on the agenda of the United Nations — namely, the Arab-Israeli conflict — make it abundantly clear that this conflict strongly impacts international peace and security, the Palestinian question in particular.

Against this backdrop, the international community has expressed its belief in the centrality of the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace based on international legality. However, we are all greatly concerned about the lack of progress towards a settlement that could lead to an end to the Israeli occupation and to the establishment of an independent

Palestinian State within the boundaries of 4 June 1967 on its national soil, with Al Quds as its capital.

The international community is unanimous in its conviction that continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian territories is the main reason for instability, the absence of peace and the escalation of tension and extremism in the region as a whole. Another cause for suffering lies in the direct political and military support by super-Powers for the occupying Power.

The whole world has witnessed the destruction, murder and displacement afflicting the Palestinian people in a manner unprecedented in modern history. This tragedy is the result of Israeli State terrorism. The massacres at Jenin, Nablus, Gaza, Bethlehem, the first and second massacres at Qana and, most recently, Beit Hanoun, and other massacres that date back to the beginning of the occupation, such as Deir Yassin and Kafr Qassim, are still fresh in our memories. No false statements can wipe out the memory of those massacres. The Zionist media war machine and those who forge history and geography will not be able to silence free opinion and the objective reports of journalists and official envoys, who have seen what happened with their own eyes. They were witnesses to what happened, and their sincere and honest testimony will be gloriously recorded in history to be reviewed by succeeding generations.

The United Nations has adopted more than 1,000 resolutions that name Israel, condemn it and call upon it to put an end to its occupation of Arab territories, to cease construction of illegal settlements and stop the Judaization of Arab Jerusalem, as well to stop construction of the racist separation wall. The fact that Israel has not responded to any of these calls is evidence that this occupying Power is the devil of international terrorism and the instigator of tension and instability. Those who provide the tools necessary for Israeli terrorism and blindly support the aggression, occupation, the settlements and the abduction of democratically elected members of the Palestinian Government bear a large part of responsibility for what is happening.

The fact that a super-Power has resorted 44 times to the use of the veto on items concerning Israel reveals a partnership in the aggression and a coercive tool that seeks to prevent the Security Council from discharging its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and for the protection of the Palestinian people from the Israeli war machine. It demonstrates an attempt to obstruct the efforts of the international community to establish law, peace and justice. It also feeds the sadistic Israeli mentality of murder in the occupied territories, prolongs occupation and prolongs Israel's defiance of international legality and its disregard for the collective wish for a comprehensive and just peace.

Resolution ES-10/16 on the illegal Israeli practices in Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territories, adopted on 17 November 2006 in the General Assembly by a large majority, has sent a clear message to Israel that the international community is fully aware of Israeli practices. The representative of Israel, in a manner considered offensive by all, described those who voted for the draft resolution as accomplices of terrorism. This is yet more proof of the irresponsibility of the policies of Israel and those who represent it.

Despite the fact that the international community broadly condemns the actions taken by Israel as the occupying Power, that country shows no regard for international legitimacy, nor for moral or humanitarian norms. How could it do otherwise, when for decades it has denied the role of this Organization that gave birth to it as a State? It has never followed instructions; instead, it has continued its pack of lies and obfuscations based on the principle of "lie, lie, and lie again, and they must eventually believe you". However, the reality is that nobody believes these Israeli lies, not even within Israel itself.

The massacres perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinians for many decades is clear proof of the fact that this occupying Power is blind to history, is myopic and afflicted by a racist malady that manifests itself in the oppression and suppression of the Palestinian people. What happened in Beit Hanoun a few weeks ago makes it clear that Israel's terrorist approach and its fundamentalist doctrine are based on murder and destruction with a view towards expansion, the consolidation of occupation and the destruction of the voices of right and justice, as well as the continued rejection of the desire to live in peace in the region. In that regard, Israel benefits from the amazing and deplorable ease with which a super-Power uses the veto to protect it.

Israel's desperate attempts to distort facts have not been confined to the moral realm; they have also been extended to the legal area. The claims of Israel and of those who support it in its aggressive pursuit of self-defence are clear evidence of that distortion. Israel is the party that since 1967 has been occupying the land of others, establishing internationally condemned settlements, displacing people and denying them their most basic rights under international law and international humanitarian law. Those bodies of law are the greatest victims of Israeli State terrorism. How can those who occupy the land of others, deny their rights and for decades carry out massacres of defenceless civilians be defending themselves?

We do not wish to see the legitimacy of the United Nations sacrificed on the altar of irresponsible and catastrophic policies. We are among the founders of the United Nations. We will continue to support the Organization, because it is our only option in the face of the outlaws, State terrorism, and the aggressors who are destroying the very foundations of human existence.

Mr. Wang Guangya (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): During the debate held at this time last year on the situation in the Middle East, nearly all of the delegations present were filled with hope for peace in the Middle East and were looking forward to seeing a year of opportunities for the Middle East gradually materialize. However, as we meet here once again today, we find the window of opportunity for peace in the Middle East still closed. Our hopes remain unfulfilled. Instead, to our profound grief and concern, we are witnessing further bloodshed and destruction.

Earlier this year, the Middle East experienced the darkest moments in its recent history. Two "hot wars" broke out, between Palestine and Israel and between Lebanon and Israel. The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory has been steadily deteriorating. What had been accomplished over many years in the rebuilding of Lebanon was wiped out overnight, and the Israeli people also sustained heavy losses. The international community, focusing its attention on the Middle East, again appealed for an end to the vicious circle of responding to violence with violence. Hatred and violence can mean only the end of peace, and military action cannot bring about peace.

Having endured untold suffering for more than half a century, the people of the Middle East long for the advent of peace and a tranquil life. That is a most fundamental human right and a most basic demand. The international community, as it discusses the responsibility to protect, must not avoid the following question: what protection have we ever provided to the Palestinian people?

China has always maintained that, as a first step towards peace, both the Palestinian and Israeli sides must cease all hostilities. Israel must immediately halt its military actions against Palestine, comply with international humanitarian law and ensure the safety of the Palestinian people and international relief workers. The Palestinian side must stop its rocket attacks against Israel.

In that regard, we welcome the recent ceasefire agreement between Palestine and Israel. We hope that both parties will honour their commitments and effectively implement the agreement. That should be immediately followed by a resumption of political negotiations and talks between the two sides.

China is convinced that the correct approach to resolving the question of Palestine is to establish, through political negotiations, an independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace with the State of Israel, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace. That would serve the fundamental interests of the Palestinian and Israeli sides and those of the people of all Middle East countries, and would foster the attainment of peace and stability in the region as soon as possible.

Peace between Palestine and Israel will not be possible without vigorous support and involvement by the international community. We appreciate the positive efforts of the Quartet to move the peace process forward. We hope that it will undertake further proactive initiatives to press both parties to break the current deadlock and fulfil their obligations under the Road Map. The international community must abide by the principles of objectivity, neutrality and impartiality, giving equal attention and consideration to the legitimate concerns and demands of both sides.

At this juncture, a number of new initiatives are in the making, including those proposed by Arab countries, France, Italy and Spain. China appreciates and supports all initiatives that will help to break the current impasse and bring Palestine and Israel back to the negotiation table. The United Nations and the

Security Council, as important entities responsible for world pace and security, should effectively shoulder their responsibilities in that regard.

The negotiations between Syria and Israel and between Lebanon and Israel are part and parcel of the Middle East peace process. Appropriate settlement of the disputes on those two tracks is essential for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East region. The expeditious resumption and progress of those negotiations will help to bring about such peace. We hope that the countries concerned will resume the negotiations at an early date in order to find a mutually acceptable solution that is in keeping with the principles set out at the Madrid Conference.

The fragile Lebanese situation is currently receiving a great deal of attention. China strongly condemns the assassination of Pierre Gemayel, Lebanese Minister of Industry, and hopes that the Lebanese people will remain united at this difficult time. It is also our hope that both sides will effectively implement Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) as an important step towards resolving the conflict between Lebanon and Israel. We look forward to the early submission of a long-term political plan by the Secretary-General aimed at resolving the conflict between Lebanon and Israel.

China is deeply concerned about the Middle East situation. Since the recent outbreak of the conflicts between Palestine and Israel and between Israel and Lebanon, China has been talking to the Israeli, Palestinian and Lebanese sides, calling for restraint and for efforts to settle their differences through negotiation. China has also provided, to the best of its ability, humanitarian assistance to Lebanon and Palestine. In addition, we have participated in the expansion of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, as called for by the United Nations.

As a permanent member of the Security Council, China has always advocated a greater role for the United Nations and the Security Council in pushing the Middle East peace process forward. As always, China will work with all peace-loving forces, continuing to play a constructive role in the quest for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): This debate appropriately coincides with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people. Indeed, the Palestinian people, who have endured a serial tragedy over the past 60 years, deserve the full solidarity and support of the international community. The United Nations, which has played a central role in the recent history of Palestine, certainly must demonstrate such solidarity with the long-suffering Palestinians. They have suffered decades of foreign occupation, repression and humiliation. They have been subjected to targeted killings, collective punishment, arbitrary detention and countless other violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law.

Pakistan has consistently and vigorously supported the just and legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination and against foreign occupation. The Palestinian people must be assisted in realizing their rightful quest for the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

As President Musharraf of Pakistan has repeatedly stated, Palestine is the core issue of the Middle East. It is this conflict which has, over the years, spawned the ever-widening circle of Israel's confrontations with all its Arab neighbours and the wider Arab and Islamic world. It is this conflict that has contributed most significantly to the anger and frustration among the peoples of the Arab and Islamic world. The resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is essential for peace and stability throughout the Middle East region. It is also essential to end extremism and eliminate terrorism.

Despite the visible implications for peace and security in the Middle East, Israel has persisted, so far, in pursuing actions and policies that have rendered a solution more difficult. Hope was briefly aroused by the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Gaza last year. But it was soon extinguished — paradoxically — as a result of democratic elections in Palestine. The Palestinians and their elected Government were quarantined — physically and fiscally; Gaza was soon reoccupied; Palestinian legislators and Cabinet ministers abducted and imprisoned. Meanwhile, Israel continued the construction of new settlements in the occupied West Bank and the illegal separation wall. It rejected negotiations, even with President Abbas. The Quartet's Road Map disappeared off the political map.

We see hope in the recent ceasefire declared by the Palestinians and Israelis. We hope this will be sustained and extended to encompass all occupied

territories. We trust that this is not a cosmetic step for Tel Aviv, designed to coincide with high-level visits to the region.

It is Pakistan's hope that there will be an urgent endeavour to provide focus and momentum for a just solution to the core issue of Palestine. Only thus can the international community achieve its aims of promoting peace in other areas of the Middle East as well.

Building on the ceasefire and Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, Israel and the Palestinians should take additional confidence-building measures. Israel should release Palestinian prisoners, including Cabinet members and legislators, remove checkpoints and other obstacles to facilitate access and movement of civilians and humanitarian workers, halt and reverse construction of the separation wall, freeze settlement activities and dismantle outposts, release customs and value added tax payments to the Palestinian Authority and accept negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, led by President Mahmoud Abbas.

We appeal to the Palestinians to take firm steps to stop maverick rocket attacks, secure the release of the captured Israeli soldier, achieve internal cohesion and establish a national unity Government with powers delegated to the Palestinian Authority and to President Abbas, to negotiate peace with Israel. In that regard, we welcome the efforts under way for establishing such a unity Government.

Such confidence-building measures could pave the way for resumption of the peace process with the support and, as necessary, the intercession of the Security Council, the Secretary-General, the Quartet, and all others who are in a position to assist this peace process. Pakistan remains ready to contribute to such a process. We also support the call, reiterated by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, for an international conference to achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The basic framework and elements for such a comprehensive peace are already present in previous agreements, the relevant Security Council resolutions, including 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, and the Quartet's Road Map.

We are confident that genuine progress on Palestine will contribute to progress on other aspects of the Middle East crisis including the Israeli-Syrian dispute over occupied Golan, the stabilization of Lebanon, the staunching of the complex and chaotic conflict in Iraq and the reduction of tensions throughout the region. This will require determined and visionary diplomacy, especially by those who wield power and influence with the principal parties. Such diplomacy is essential if we are to defy the dire predictions of disaster in the Middle East that abound today.

Mr. Kariyawasam (Sri Lanka): I would like to thank the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Ambassador Paul Badji of Senegal, for presenting the Committee's report. We appreciate the Committee's efforts to promote the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the mobilization of international support for their cause. We thank Ambassador Badji for his initiative and leadership in this regard.

Sri Lanka has consistently supported the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and their right to an independent sovereign State based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and other relevant resolutions. In this regard, I wish to quote the message from the President of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, a friend of the Palestinian people, issued on the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People:

> "Sri Lanka has been a consistent advocate for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We have extended our firm and unequivocal support to the just struggle in obtaining their rights, including the right to statehood.
>
> "For over 30 years, I have associated myself with the cause of Palestine and supported activities aimed at promoting the rights and freedoms of the Palestinian people.
>
> "Reports of the continued hardships and deprivations suffered by the people in the occupied territories almost on a daily basis fill me with profound sorrow. It is my most sincere hope that efforts to pursue an end to violence will soon succeed, leading to the emergence of peace in the Middle East.

"On behalf of the Government and the people of Sri Lanka, I take this opportunity to reaffirm our continuing solidarity with the Palestinian people. We share their aspirations and their hopes of seeing an end to foreign occupation and the achievement of a lasting solution for the realization of a Palestinian State and a durable peace."

Last year we welcomed the removal of Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and hoped that those and other confidence-building measures would enhance the prospects for reviving negotiations in the context of the Road Map. Regrettably, there was no progress on this account either immediately after the pull-out or in the months that followed. On the contrary, violence increased and the situation in Gaza deteriorated to unprecedented levels. We are also concerned about the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the continued construction of a separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territories.

However, the reported agreement reached between President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel to establish a mutual ceasefire in Gaza is a welcome development. We hope that the parties will abide by their commitments and refrain from any action that could dim prospects for peace in the region.

We support the efforts by the Quartet to reopen the peace negotiations between the parties and encourage the parties to move forward towards sustained discussions to arrive at a durable settlement of all issues of concern. It is of the utmost importance that all parties respect their obligations and put an end to all violent acts. Serious efforts must be made for the early resumption of negotiations among the parties concerned with the objective of reaching a final agreement for Palestinians and Israelis to live side by side within secure and recognized boundaries. We urge all parties to take concrete steps and confidence-building measures towards achieving this objective.

Mr. Hoang Chi Trung (Viet Nam): It is a great honour for me to speak on behalf of the Vietnamese delegation on agenda item 14, entitled "Question of Palestine". At the outset, let me to join all those who have spoken previously in expressing sincere thanks to the Secretary-General for his report, contained in document A/61/355. Our delegation also wishes to thank the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for his report, contained in document A/61/35. My delegation fully endorses the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The resolution of the question of Palestine is the key to a lasting peace in the Middle East. It has been the focus of the United Nations, as well as the international community, for many decades now. Unfortunately, the question of Palestine remains unresolved, and the Palestinian people are still deprived of their inalienable rights, which include the rights to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty, as well as the right to return to their homeland.

It is truly disheartening to see the escalation of violence in the region. The year 2006 has been marked by a steady deterioration in the security, economic and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We are particularly concerned about the Israeli incursions into Gaza during recent months and their destructive effects on the Palestinian people. We were particularly shocked by the indiscriminate killings of women and children by the Israeli military forces in Beit Hanoun on 8 November. That act of violence would be deplorable under any circumstances. In this respect, we welcome the decisions of the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council to send fact-finding missions to investigate the incident. In our view, Israel must do its utmost to cooperate with those missions so that there can be justice for the victims.

Our delegation joins many other delegations in calling upon Israel to put an immediate end to its military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory. We fully endorse the statement contained in the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People that Israel, the occupying Power, is squarely bound by the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. In order to facilitate the dialogue between the belligerent parties and to pave the way for fruitful negotiations, it is imperative that Israel end its incursions into Gaza, cease offensive military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory, withdraw its forces to their original positions outside Gaza and release, immediately and

unconditionally, all imprisoned cabinet ministers and parliamentarians, as well as other Palestinian prisoners. It is also incumbent upon the Palestinian Authority, for its part, to take effective action to put an end to violence, including the firing of rockets into Israeli territory.

Our delegation calls on Israel to cancel all settlement expansion activities in the West Bank, as well as efforts to complete the construction of the wall on Palestinian land. We wish to reiterate that the settlements and the wall constructed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are contrary to international law and numerous resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as the provisions of the Road Map. Our delegation welcomes the signing of the National Conciliation Document by the major Palestinian political organizations and the decision to form a national unity government. At the same time, we feel strongly that the international community should focus on practical and meaningful measures to engage all parties in support of major international peace efforts, including the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

Finally, we wish to underline that only a negotiated solution can bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine, through the establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders, in line with the principle of land for peace and on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

My delegation wishes to reaffirm the consistent support of the Government and the people of my country for the just cause of the Palestinian people in their heroic and tireless struggle for independence, sovereignty and statehood. In this connection, we would like to express our strong support for the relentless efforts made by the United Nations and the Quartet to promote the peace process in the Middle East. We strongly believe that peace will ultimately prevail in the region.

Mr. Oegroseno (Indonesia): Allow me at the outset to align my delegation with the statement delivered yesterday by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Two weeks ago, the General Assembly met here at its resumed tenth emergency special session to consider the situation in Palestine as a result of the unfortunate failure of the Security Council to adopt a resolution in response to the renewed violent assault by Israeli forces in Gaza, in which a total of 82 Palestinians were killed in one week. Nineteen of that number, mostly women and children, were wiped out in one swift attack in the town of Beit Hanoun.

Despite this senseless violence and horror, which were condemned worldwide, the Council was still unable to do the decent and correct thing, for which we expressed our deepest regret.

My delegation is pleased that at the resumed tenth emergency special session, this Assembly did as was expected of it. In its resolution ES-10/16, it deplored the Israeli military actions in the Gaza Strip and urged Israel to immediately withdraw its troops. The Assembly also called for an immediate cessation of Israel military operations that threaten the civilian population in Palestine and all acts of violence, incitement and destruction between the parties, as well as for the dispatch of a fact-finding mission to Beit Hanoun.

We recall that the Human Rights Council held a special session early this month to review this tragic event. That was the third special session of the Commission since the Council was established in June — all of them on Israel. This consistent appearance on the Council agenda is because Israel's military's policy has not changed; it only changes in the way it is expressed from one location to another and from one event to another.

As a result of Israel's militarism, the entire peace agenda in the Middle East is in danger. The humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate and the area is poised to return to full-scale conflict. This development tells us quite forcefully that the time has come for further actions to be taken by the international community to move forward on the situation in Palestine.

In this respect, the mutual ceasefire agreed at the weekend is a positive window of opportunity to be sustained. It is the responsibility of all concerned parties to capitalize on this momentum in order to revive the peace process, as experience has proven that there is no military solution to this conflict.

Similarly, Israeli's unilateral policy of withholding Palestinian taxes and customs collections — which only worsens the already dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people — must be terminated without delay. On this point, we certainly support the Palestinian people's endeavour to establish a new coalition Government, as it would pave the way for the alleviation of the dire humanitarian situation that has been inflicted on the Palestinians as a result of the exercise of their democratic choice.

The international community should also seize this momentum so as to strengthen it and to bring the desperate humanitarian situation in Palestine under control. We should look beyond the current crisis and focus on the broader issue of implementing the Road Map of the Quartet, the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

We reiterate that the realization of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side within secure, internationally recognized borders, remains the only way to end the cycle of violence in the region. In the efforts to generate a new approach to revive the new process, we support the proposal of the League of Arab States for an international conference to find a comprehensive framework for larger peace in the Middle East.

Finally, we are grateful to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its work under very difficult circumstances, as well as the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat and the Department of Public Information, for their continued support to promote the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people for self-determination and independence. With that in mind, my delegation is pleased to support the balanced text of the draft resolutions before us.

Mr. Yousfi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People that our Assembly is considering today (A/61/35) describes, in a clear and detailed way, the daily humiliations of the Palestinian population under Israeli occupation. The vain attempts to discredit the work of the Committee only validate the facts related and the serious accusations made in the report against the occupying Power.

My delegation wishes here to renew its full confidence in and to pay tribute to the Committee for the excellent work that it has done in order to allow the Palestinian people to enjoy their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination.

In the name of self-defence and the fight against terrorism, Israel has engaged in all kinds of subterfuge to justify its repeated attacks against the Palestinian population, and has adopted the policy of collective punishment to try to quell the will of an entire people seeking to implement its objective of establishing an independent State that enjoys full and complete sovereignty within safe and internationally recognized borders, living side by side with its neighbours in peace and security.

Through the inhumane and degrading practices affecting all segments of the Palestinian population on a daily basis and which have spared neither women nor children, nor the legitimately elected representatives of the Palestinian people, Israel is only confirming the doubt that world public opinion has regarding its sincerity in looking for a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian problem.

After having methodically busied themselves for years weakening the painstakingly established Palestinian institutions and diminishing the already reduced capacity of the Palestinian Authority to govern, Israel this year found a new pretext for making a hostage of the entire occupied Palestinian territory, in particular by transforming Gaza into a vast prison by systematically closing off the territory, by increasing the number of its fixed and mobile checkpoints, by closing points of passage for goods and individuals and, especially, by blackmailing the Palestinian Authority by suspending money due in the form of duties and taxes.

In fact, it has happened that the democratic choice made by the Palestinian people about its leadership was not to the liking of the occupying Power, which, since the Palestinian legislative elections, has attempted to put forth all manner of obstacles to impede the normal operation of Palestinian institutions, a fact that has contributed to an exacerbation of the tragic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The unabated construction of the separation wall, regardless of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, the policy of illegal expropriation of Palestinian lands and settlement expansion are jeopardizing the chances of survival for a future

Palestinian State, as well as harming the idea of two independent States, living side by side in peace and security, even though the Israeli leaders claim to be devoted to this principle.

The international community, including the Quartet, must not remain passive in view of the deteriorating situation in humanitarian and security terms and the aggravation of economic and social conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory owing to Israeli practices. The abusive and disproportionate use of force, which has claimed numerous victims among the civilian population and which, on 8 November 2006, culminated in the massacre at Beit Hanoun, is a brutal reminder of the need for the international community to assume its responsibility and compel Israel to conform to the rules and principles of international law, including international humanitarian law.

The United Nations has an ongoing responsibility, with respect to the question of Palestine, to assure that the issue will be resolved in all its aspects in compliance with international law. The Security Council, in particular, must become more active, play its full role given to it under the United Nations Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security and ensure that Israel complies with its obligations under the Road Map and adheres to Security Council resolutions.

Algeria continues to believe that the peaceful resolution of the question of Palestine can be based only on a negotiated solution that is compatible with international law, with the relevant United Nations resolutions, and in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003). We call for an immediate resumption of negotiations aimed at a final settlement, as called for by the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted in Beirut in 2002.

We believe that unilateral actions under the false pretext that there is no credible negotiating partner are liable to further complicate the situation and bring us further away from the chances for a negotiated settlement for good.

The periods of turmoil that roil the Middle East confirm that peace and stability cannot be established in the region unless there is a peaceful, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, based on the principles of land for peace and Israel's withdrawal from all Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan and Sheba'a Farms in Lebanon. We believe here that the illegal decision dated 14 December 1981 and all measures imposing Israeli legal and administrative authority on the Golan are null and void, and we would ask the occupying Power to apply international law and withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The Israeli aggression in Lebanon during last summer, with its procession of loss of life and destruction, are proof of the fragility of the situation in the region and shows how vain all attempts to resort to force are, as they seek to circumscribe the will of the people to free themselves from occupation.

Mr. Maema (Lesotho): First of all, the delegation of Lesotho aligns itself with the statement that was delivered by the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

As we commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, Lesotho wishes to reiterate its solidarity with the Palestinian people and our support for its inalienable rights.

My delegation commends the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report. Our congratulations also go to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its enlightening report and insightful recommendations.

My delegation recalls that, last year, when this agenda item was considered by the Assembly, some notable events had just taken place in parts of the occupied Palestinian territory and had given a glimpse of promise and hope that a political dialogue between the relevant parties could resume. Indeed, with the removal of the Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank; the withdrawal of the Israeli Army from the Gaza Strip in September 2005; and the opening of the Rafah crossing on 25 November 2005, a true and lasting peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine seemed feasible. My delegation is, therefore, perplexed that, as this Assembly discusses this important issue again at its current session, the overall situation in the occupied Palestinian territory remains serious and has, in fact, deteriorated in some areas, including in the Gaza Strip.

It is a hard fact that the Palestinian people's struggle for self-determination, national independence and sovereignty has been going on for far too long and that the cost in terms of human lives has been very high. It is, therefore, very regrettable that the year 2006 has witnessed the highest level of disrespect for international humanitarian law, carried out in the form of major military incursions and air strikes that have targeted the Palestinian civilian population, while the international community, particularly those tasked with the maintenance of international peace and security, remained paralyzed or indifferent. The massacre in Beit Hanoun on 8 November 2006, is just one case in many. We appeal to all parties to the conflict to honour the recent fledgling ceasefire and to show restraint.

As we approach the fortieth anniversary of the occupation of the Palestinian territory, my delegation appeals to members of the international community, particularly the United Nations membership, to approach this issue with renewed vigour and determination in order to put an end to the plight of the Palestinian people. We appeal to the international donors that have stopped assistance programmes to the Palestinians to reconsider their decision and to adopt measures that would improve the humanitarian situation and not have a punitive effect on the entire Palestinian population, including women and children. On another level, my delegation encourages the relevant parties to the conflict to resume meaningful negotiations for a true and lasting peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. In this regard, my delegation asserts that, with the assistance of the international community, all parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must adhere to the relevant principles of international law; all relevant United Nations resolutions must be implemented. All measures aimed at addressing this issue should first and foremost recognize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, particularly the right to self-determination.

We join previous speakers who stressed that the Quartet Road Map remains the only path towards a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. We also share the same views as speakers who have expressed support for a vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders. Above all, my delegation views the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, as the cornerstone for bringing the question of Palestine to a final, true and sustainable peaceful settlement.

Mr. Ba-Omar (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of Oman, it gives me pleasure to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to Ambassador Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, on the Committee's comprehensive report contained in document A/61/35. I cannot fail to express our special appreciation for his efforts, made with the other members of the Committee, to support the Palestinian people. I would also like to thank him for his inclusive statement on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

It is clear that our meeting today is of special significance, since it deals with a question that the international community has failed to resolve for decades. The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories continues to worsen day by day, a situation that obviously cannot continue. More than 50 years of killing, displacement and destruction of infrastructure have not discouraged the brave Palestinian people from continuing to demand their legitimate rights, namely, the right to establish their independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

Yesterday marked the twenty-ninth annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which, since 1977, has expressed a strong international stand in support of the Palestinian people in their tireless endeavours to attain their legitimate and inalienable rights. On the occasion of that international day, we reiterate the support and solidarity of the people and Government of Oman with the brotherly people of Palestine, until the attainment of all their legitimate aspirations, namely, the elimination of the occupation and the exercise of their right to self-determination.

Yesterday was also the fifty-ninth anniversary of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), on the partition of Palestine into two States, in 1947. Israel, one of those States, came into being; the other, Palestine, has not yet seen the light of day. The people of Palestine continue to be denied their legitimate rights and their independence, national sovereignty and the right to self-determination.

This situation has led to the suffering by more than four million Palestinian refugees of the pains of diaspora, exile and deprivation. The Palestinian people

have always looked to this international Organization, to protect them from repeated Israeli aggression.

Those practices have exceeded all limits. The international community must take a strong, serious position by sending a clear, unambiguous message to Israel, calling upon it to desist forthwith from those practices, and to engage in genuine negotiations. Such negotiations would lead to the establishment of stability and security on the basis of the terms of reference of the peace process, namely, the principle of land for peace, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.

The option of peace requires political will on the part of all parties, in order to establish genuine peace based on justice and equity. Peace cannot be achieved through killing, violence and the exercise of all forms of terrorism against defenceless people who have no support for the attainment of their rights but that of God and the international community. Peace is a strategic choice that requires taking a long view in order to enter into a real partnership, the purpose of which is to put an end to violence and recognize the right of others to live in peace.

The world felt optimistic when the parties concerned decided to engage in the peace process that started in Madrid, under the auspices of the United States and the Russian Federation. That process culminated in the signing of the Oslo Accords between the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships, as well as subsequent agreements. However, that optimism evaporated when one of the parties reneged on its commitment, preferring to resort to military power and oppression as a means to settle differences.

The Government of Oman continues to be among the first to welcome the peace process and has considered that process, consisting in essence of dialogue and negotiations, to be the civilized and natural way to settle differences. Therefore, we call upon the parties concerned and the sponsors of the peace process to act effectively to settle the conflict in the Middle East, in view of the gravity of the situation and the current escalation of the tension there.

The Security Council and the Quartet must discharge their responsibilities by responding to the recent initiative of the League of Arab States calling for a peace conference attended by the Arab parties, Israel and the permanent members of the Security Council in order to reach a just and comprehensive solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict on all tracks, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions and the principle of land for peace. Such a conference must result in the realization of the vision of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace within internationally recognized borders. This vision was reiterated by the relevant resolutions, the Israeli-Palestinian agreements, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.

In this regard, we welcome the ceasefire reached recently in Gaza between Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel. This agreement might be a good start to revive the peace process. It might also help the Security Council and the parties concerned to play a more effective role in breathing new life into all the tracks of the Arab-Israeli peace process, namely, the Palestinian track, the Syrian track dealing with the occupied Golan, and the Lebanese track dealing with the Sheba'a Farms.

Finally, we call upon the international community to support all efforts for the establishment of peace in the Middle East. This goal can be achieved only by recognizing the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent State and live in peace in an internationally recognized sovereign State. We call upon the international community to continue to support the Palestinian people and the relevant United Nations agencies and bodies that deal with achieving justice for the question of Palestine.

Mr. McNee (Canada): Canada has always been and remains wholly committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We support Israel's right to live within secure borders, free from the threat of violence, conflict and terror. We support a negotiated solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the establishment of an independent, viable and democratic Palestinian State living side by side in peace with its neighbours.

Canada has thus been deeply disheartened by the dramatic deterioration in the security and humanitarian situation and the consequent tragic human toll in the region over the past year. The dynamics in the region must change. International law must be respected by all.

The Palestinian Authority and Israel need to take immediate steps to bring peace, stability and security to their peoples. The Palestinian Authority must take

measures to address Israel's security concerns by controlling and preventing terrorist violence. While Israel has the right to defend itself, it must exercise the utmost restraint in order to avoid casualties among innocent civilians and damage to civilian infrastructure.

The resolution of this crisis depends on an end to terror and violence. It depends on the acceptance by the Government of the Palestinian Authority of Israel's fundamental right to exist and of previously signed agreements. It depends on an end to the launching of Qassam rockets into Israeli towns and on the return of the Israeli corporal to his family in Israel. It depends on the Government of Israel's recognizing and meeting its obligations under international law to prevent harm to the Palestinian civilian population and damage to civilian infrastructure. It depends on Israel's refraining from taking actions that could prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations, including those relating to settlements.

The international community, with the Quartet in the lead, must do everything in its power to encourage renewed political dialogue and a return to negotiations. The United Nations and its Member States, too, must play a more constructive role in supporting Middle East peace efforts if we are to achieve long-term security and stability in the region.

United Nations agencies make a particularly important contribution to development and humanitarian assistance in the region, and they require our continued support. Canada, however, does not believe that all the work that is being done within the United Nations is contributing to resolving the conflict. Resolutions on the Middle East that come before the Assembly, for example, are rarely helpful in achieving the goal we all seek: peace in the Middle East. We believe that, as States Members of the United Nations, we have to act with the greatest responsibility in our work in the General Assembly and elsewhere in the United Nations system. Canada has criticized inflammatory and divisive language in resolutions, and we will not support resolutions that use emotive and provocative language in place of the plain facts.

(*spoke in French*)

We believe that, in the final analysis, a negotiated settlement is the only way to establish peace. Both sides must one day agree to sit down at the negotiation table to reach a final status agreement. Such an agreement must recognize that Israel is a legitimate neighbour and must ensure the long-term security and integrity of that country. It must also provide the Palestinian people with an independent and viable State that fulfils their right to self-determination.

Certainly, nothing can replace the efforts of the parties themselves, including their resolve to act and their political will to make progress. However, the States Members of the United Nations, which we represent here, can and must create the momentum, the framework and the political perspectives needed to settle the conflict and establish a lasting peace.

Canada welcomes with much satisfaction the agreement reached recently between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert. We commend them for their leadership, and we reaffirm our support for a negotiated two-State solution. To build hopes for peace, this important first step must be followed with decisive action by both parties.

Mr. Malhotra (India): Thank you, Madam President, for scheduling sufficient time for a discussion on an issue that warrants the attention of the international community to the extent that few others do: the question of Palestine, set, as it is, in the larger context of the situation in the Middle East.

We have listened with attention to the many preceding speakers. The grim perspective that has informed most statements is particularly striking. The same pessimistic outlook is visible in the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/61/35) and in the Secretary-General's report of September this year on the question of Palestine (A/61/355). Sadly, despite repeated and detailed consideration of this matter in this forum and elsewhere within these premises, we remain no closer to a solution than we were at this time last year.

The events of the past few months have been deeply distressing for all concerned, set, as they are, in the tragic context of a growing humanitarian crisis, a collapsing Palestinian economy, the absence of dialogue and an intensification of the vicious circle of attacks, reprisals and counterattacks. All of that has an immediate and long-term impact on the lives and the psyche of the people, as well as on the infrastructure of daily life in the entire region. No justification makes any of those developments more palatable, irrespective of whether the victims are Israeli or Palestinian. The current context not only reduces the possibility of

productive dialogue; it also lessens the prospects of any genuine efforts to move towards a solution in the near future.

Violence and the use of force not only will fail to produce a durable solution but could well postpone moves towards any solution, quite apart from creating conditions for further exacerbation of the situation. While it has been stated several times before and in many eloquent ways, this central truth bears repetition: a just, fair, durable and credible solution to this vexing problem can come only from meaningful, sincere and results-oriented dialogue — not a session of recriminations based on the apportioning of blame, but a dialogue that is genuinely forward-looking.

It is in that context that India has consistently urged the resumption of a direct, face-to-face dialogue of principals based on the Quartet principles. We also remain convinced that the Road Map, as endorsed by Security Council resolution 1515 (2003), remains a valid framework of reference for an eventual settlement, even though its originally envisioned target date for a settlement already passed last year.

To that end, we are with the overwhelming majority of countries that consistently affirm their commitment to a negotiated two-State solution, accepted by the two principals, that would result in a viable, contiguous, sovereign and independent State of Palestine, existing side by side with Israel in peace and security. We support the call of the Secretary-General for the consideration by all sides of innovative ways to fully implement the Road Map, thus leading without delay to a just, fair, equitable and mutually acceptable solution to this conflict, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions.

We cannot but be deeply concerned by the heavy humanitarian cost that is sometimes overshadowed by the larger, more gruesome headlines that violence begets. The spiral of chaos has long-term implications for the stability of the entire region. We reiterate our call for the adoption of urgent measures to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people. The impact of the collapsing economy, outlined in the Secretary-General's report, carries the portents of a dramatic humanitarian disaster in the making. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that such a disaster is averted at all costs.

In conclusion, we would like to express once again our sincere hope that the Quartet and all States in the region will resume efforts to de-escalate the situation and will take proactive steps to avert a humanitarian crisis, which otherwise appears inevitable. We also believe that our overall objective must be to move the dialogue forward — if nothing else, by creating a favourable environment for its resumption by the principals.

As the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process said last week, only the Palestinians can convince Israel that they can be peaceful neighbours, and only Israel can persuade Palestinians that a two-State solution is available and can be worked towards. We must work to make that happen in the shortest possible time.

Mr. Gómez (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, my delegation wishes to associate itself with the statement made yesterday by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We welcome the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, whose work we support. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela wishes to express its concern at the situation of the completely defenceless civilian population, especially women, children and the elderly, in the occupied Palestinian territories, given that they are unable to exercise freely their human rights, as stated in the Caracas declaration issued by the Committee at a meeting held in Venezuela in December 2005.

We reaffirm also our strongest support for the Human Rights Council's condemnation on 16 November of the killing of Palestinian civilians in Beit Hanoun and Gaza, and for the contents of the Council's draft resolution A/HRC/S-2/L.1, which condemns the systematic violation of human rights committed in Lebanon by the militaristic elite that heads the Government of Israel. We demand respect for the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and its two Additional Protocols of 1977 relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts.

We support the recommendation of the Special Rapporteur, Philip Alston, as contained in his report on the worldwide situation in regard to extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions (A/61/311). He states in paragraph 66 of the report that:

"A thorough and systematic investigation of all killings that occurred in Gaza, Lebanon and northern Israel since the beginning of June 2006 is indispensable."

The situation in the Middle East continues to be one of the greatest moral obligations of the international community, and in particular of the Organization, which came into being with the mandate of ensuring international peace and security and the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as the rules governing coexistence among the community of nations.

A few days ago, on 17 November, because of the Security Council's failure to take action owing to the veto cast by the United States, the General Assembly had to shoulder its responsibilities in the area of international peace and security, resuming its tenth emergency special session so as to address the issue of illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory and adopting resolution ES-10/16. We urge that all measures set out in that resolution be implemented in full.

Our country has always striven to promote a definitive solution to the question of Palestine so as to achieve a stable and lasting peace in the Middle East. In that regard, we have supported all of the agreements reached between the parties in the quest for a peaceful and negotiated settlement. In that regard, we deem it vital that the Palestinian people be able fully to realize their fundamental rights. We have embraced their cause, as we earlier embraced that of the victims of Nazi barbarity.

Venezuela rejects the use of violence as an instrument for the settlement of conflicts. Legitimate self-defence and proportionality are not incompatible legal concepts. The first serves as justification, and the second is an element of the former. There can be no legitimate self-defence without proportionality, because if excesses are committed in the context of defensive action, then the use of force ceases to be legitimate and becomes aggression dissociated from any prior occurrence. We are convinced that the maintenance of international peace and security is premised on the fact that relations among States — regardless of their ideological, cultural or political differences — should be governed by strict adherence to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and by respect for international law, including the principle of peaceful coexistence among States.

The delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reaffirms that the right to life is an absolute and inalienable right and that the Organization must respect and defend it. All of us, regardless of race, religion or political convictions, must ensure and monitor respect for the norms of international law in defence of the right to life of Palestinians, Israelis, Lebanese, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, atheists — all the citizens of the planet — because it was not by accident or out of opportunism that we signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We hope that the General Assembly's overwhelming approval today of the draft resolutions submitted on the question of Palestine will once again send clear messages as to the need to respect the rights of the brotherly Palestinian people — rights that have been violated repeatedly, in contravention of the resolutions adopted by the various organs of the United Nations on this issue, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

Mrs. Juul (Norway): Recently we have seen developments in the Middle East that may warrant cautious optimism. We are encouraged to learn about the recent ceasefire in Gaza. We condemn those extremists who, by continuing to fire Qassam missiles into Israeli territory, have tried to undermine that ceasefire, and we commend the Israeli Government for not having responded to those provocations. The restraint and goodwill shown by the Israeli Government are very important. We applaud the fact that there seems to be constructive cooperation on the ground between the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and Palestinian security units in enforcing the ceasefire.

The parties have a responsibility to take all necessary measures to break the cycle of violence. We expect them to explore all possible avenues to extend the ceasefire to the West Bank. The parties must also bear in mind the fact that no conflict is above international humanitarian law, and that the security and the plight of civilians on both sides must weigh equally heavily. But, that said, it should also be pointed out that Israel, as the occupying Power, has a particular responsibility. The highest price today is being paid by

the Palestinian civilian population, and Israel has an obligation to address that issue adequately.

We also welcome the news that Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit will, hopefully, be freed soon. We hope that Prime Minister Olmert will follow up on his recent statements that, as a gesture of goodwill, Israel will release a number of Palestinian prisoners. Let me in that regard particularly emphasize the need for the immediate release of the 36 members of the Palestinian Parliament and Cabinet that are currently in Israeli custody. It is absolutely unacceptable that duly elected representatives of the Palestinian people should be imprisoned. They should be freed without delay, regardless of other developments.

We look forward with anticipation to the successful completion of efforts to forge a new national coalition Cabinet on the Palestinian side. We fully support President Abbas' endeavours towards that end. President Abbas enjoys both Palestinian and international legitimacy and stands firm on the basic norms of international relations. He underlines that the platform of any Palestinian government must reflect the three principles set out by the Quartet: acceptance of previous Governments' agreements, renunciation of violence and terror, and recognition of Israel's right to exist. If President Abbas succeeds in creating a Palestinian Government, we should not be slow to react but be ready to resume international assistance and to work with the new Government.

Norway, as Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, is prepared to reinforce the international effort to financially support a new Palestinian administration. We look forward to fruitful cooperation with the other donor nations and international institutions as well as the parties on this issue.

It is important that the Palestinian people see an immediate effect and that the hardship on innocent civilians be eliminated to the largest extent possible. The single most important measure to normalize the situation for Palestinians would be to abolish the closure regime. Norway therefore urges Israel to lift closures and allow normal imports and exports, and to let people move as freely as possible through entry and exit posts.

While Norway recognizes Israel's security concerns, we cannot accept the construction of the separation barrier on occupied land on the West Bank. Nor can we accept the continued construction activities in the Israeli settlements on the West Bank. The building of the barrier, the construction in the settlements and the development of a separate road network for the settlements are all inconsistent with international law and create facts on the ground that are detrimental to the establishment of a contiguous and viable Palestinian State, and thus to a peaceful solution to the conflict. We must emphasize strongly that none of Israel's unilateral measures must be allowed to prejudge a final solution of presently unresolved questions.

Our goal is two viable States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. At this critical juncture, we must join forces and do our utmost to make this vision come true.

Mr. Shinyo (Japan): During the past year, we have witnessed the playing out of a large-scale crisis in the situation concerning Israel and Palestine. This crisis has been brought about by the political impasse that followed the Palestinian Legislative Council elections and by the cycle of violence between Israel and Palestine resulting from the abduction of an Israeli soldier, Corporal Gilad Shalit. The deteriorating political and humanitarian situation on the ground continues to be of great concern.

Last week, for the first time in quite a while, we received positive news that offers some hope for the future to the people in the region. Japan welcomes the agreement announced by Israel and the Palestinian Authority to establish a mutual ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. We have high expectations that this ceasefire will contribute significantly to advancing the Middle East peace process. Japan also highly appreciates the leadership of President Abbas of the Palestinian Authority and Prime Minister Olmert of Israel in achieving this ceasefire. Japan encourages both parties to make further efforts to extend the ceasefire to the West Bank.

Japan reiterates its call upon both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides to exercise maximum restraint in order to ensure that the ceasefire remains in effect. It is also our hope, especially at this critical moment, that a direct summit meeting between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert will be held as soon as possible, with a view to the early resumption of peace negotiations.

The difficulties that the Middle East is confronting cannot be surmounted through violence, but only through concerted and dedicated efforts and a strong will for peace among the concerned parties. The two-State solution is the only way to attain peace and prosperity in the region. The international community, for its part, must provide the necessary assistance to Israel and Palestine in order for them to realize at the earliest possible time the goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living peacefully side by side in coexistence and mutual prosperity.

Japan strongly expects that, through the continued efforts of the Palestinians concerned, a new Palestinian Authority government will be formed, which will pursue peace with Israel and the aforementioned goals. If a new Palestinian Authority government, once established, clearly indicates such a policy and direction, the international community should respond positively and support its efforts.

The continuing deterioration of the humanitarian, economic and fiscal situation in Palestine is a matter of deep concern. We stress once again that an immediate Israeli resumption of the transfer of tax and customs revenues to the Palestinian Authority, as well as the relaxation of restrictions on movement, are matters of utmost priority.

Japan has long been a major donor to the Palestinian people and has been steadily implementing its pledged assistance, including the emergency humanitarian assistance of $25 million announced in July. We wish to reaffirm our determination to continue to extend assistance to the Palestinian people. Japan is also working, together with Israel, Palestine and Jordan, on the so-called corridor of peace and prosperity, a concept to build confidence and make coexistence and mutual prosperity a reality through development of the Jordan Valley from a mid- to long-term perspective.

The conflict between Israel and Hizbollah, which broke out last summer, has reinforced our belief that peace and stability in the region cannot be achieved without stability in Lebanon. To establish such stability requires the full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, for which active efforts on the part of its neighbour, Syria, are essential. A comprehensive peace that includes both the Lebanese and the Syrian tracks is the only way to a permanent peace. From that point of view, the countries in the region, including Syria, have a critically important role for the realization of peace and stability there.

Japan intends to continue to be actively engaged in the international and regional efforts for alleviating tensions, restoring stability and nurturing a spirit of mutual trust and cooperation in the region, in order to finally achieve peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Yazdi (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the very outset, and on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to reiterate the solidarity of the Government and the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the Palestinian people and Government in their brave struggle to defend their inalienable rights.

May I take this opportunity to express my delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General for his informative reports and to the Chairman and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their tireless efforts to address the torment and onerous circumstances of the people of Palestine.

This year's report once again illustrates the uninterrupted and growing violations of the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people by the Israeli regime, resulting in the deterioration of the situation to an unprecedented and intolerable level. As the report indicates, throughout the period under review, the systematic pattern of human rights violations and massive breaches of international law and international humanitarian law by the Israeli regime has continued unabated.

A fundamental principle of international law flowing from the United Nations Charter is the illegality of the acquisition of territory by the use of force. The occupation of Arab lands in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, which grossly contravenes that fundamental principle, lies at the heart of the festering crises in the Middle East. It gives rise to the illegal and criminal practices committed by the occupying forces, which all emanate from the inherent dynamics of occupation.

The indiscriminate use of military force, the wilful killing and collective punishment of the Palestinians, the destruction of their homes and infrastructure, the efforts to strangle them economically, the unrelenting expansion of Jewish settlements on the occupied lands and targeted

assassinations — all of which are prohibited under international law — continued during the year under review. Indeed, the report documents and records the frequent resort to all of those practices by the Israeli regime.

The report at hand depicts the brutal Israeli military campaign in Gaza over the past summer, which included aerial bombardments, ground activities, the arrest of Palestinian cabinet ministers and lawmakers and the destruction of civilian infrastructure — including the only electric power plant in Gaza, roads and bridges, as well as many other public and private installations. These atrocious crimes have resulted in the killing of over 202 Palestinians, including 40 children. According to the report, from September 2005 to August 2006, 450 Palestinians have been killed and over 2,500 wounded, which underscores the ever-present reality of the brutal, violent and oppressive policies and practices of the occupying regime against the defenceless Palestinian people.

During the year under review, the Israeli regime implemented a number of cruel restrictive and punitive measures, such as checkpoints, curfews and closures, that adversely affected the Palestinians and in turn have added to their suffering and hardship. At the same time, the Israeli settlement activities in the occupied territories continued unabated, and the occupiers began the construction of thousands of housing units in the West Bank and Al-Quds. The pace of construction of the separation wall in the West Bank also accelerated during the reporting period. In that regard, land expropriation orders were issued by the Israeli regime to allow the extension of the wall around Al-Quds.

The Palestinian election, held on 25 January 2006, was a landmark development in the history of the region. Nevertheless, the reaction of the Israeli regime and a number of western Governments to that important development was not only unproductive and disgraceful, but helped unmask the real face of the kind of democracy that certain quarters in the West seek to extend to the region. While 1,000 international observers, including missions from the European Union, the United States and Canada, observed the conduct of the elections and called the process free and fair, soon the United States and a few of its allies embarked on a campaign to deny the results of the elections, undermine the Government emanating therefrom and subject the Palestinian people to further hardship and suffering for freely expressing their will.

The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan is not very different. It continues to be another source of tension in the region and the Israelis have thus far indicated that they are not intent on considering a withdrawal from the Golan. Rather, they have made repeated attempts to alter the demographic and legal character of the area by establishing new settlements and imposing their laws on Syrian citizens in contravention of all relevant United Nations resolutions.

Moreover, the aggression of last summer by the Israeli regime against Lebanon and the subsequent humiliating defeat of that aggression have not stopped the regime from continuing to threaten the Lebanese people and Government. As has been repeatedly indicated by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the Israeli regime continues to occupy Lebanese lands and to violate Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), including through daily violations of Lebanese airspace and harassment of UNIFIL forces. Such dangerous practices will undoubtedly create more instability and serve to inflame tensions and threaten further destabilization of the situation in that volatile part of the region.

It is evident that the settlement of the Palestinian issue is imperative and indispensable for the attainment of a comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East and beyond. Peace in the Middle East cannot be achieved through aggression, state terrorism, intimidation and occupation. It is, indeed, long overdue for the international community to take meaningful measures to restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The Charter of United Nations has bestowed an immense responsibility upon this world body to help find a fair, just and durable solution to the crisis, which constitutes the core of the Middle East conflict.

We believe that a durable peace in Palestine will be possible only through the full restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people, including the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland and the establishment of a Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Irhiam (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I wish to convey my thanks to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of

the Palestinian People for their continued efforts to assist the Palestinian people to restore their usurped rights.

For the past six decades, the General Assembly has discussed the issue that we continue to address today. Undoubtedly, the fact that the item is still on the agenda of the General Assembly proves that the international community has failed in its responsibility towards the Palestinian people. We have failed to establish peace and security in the region and we have failed to ensure respect for international law.

The history of the United Nations demonstrates that the Palestinian people are the ones who have suffered the most from the injustices of terrorism and the destruction of their land. It is also true that the question of Palestine is the issue that has been subjected to the most extensive use of double standards. We do not exaggerate when we say that the United Nations has been misused against the Palestinian people.

The United Nations has recognized the establishment of an entity of immigrants on Palestinian land and has failed to allow the Palestinians to recover their lands and establish their own independent State. It has also failed to protect the Palestinians from massacres carried out by occupation forces. They have buckled before a small group of States that have taken action to protect the occupying forces and allow them to continue their massacres against the Palestinian people.

When the Palestinians take up weapons to resist occupation and to defend their rights, the occupying Power calls them terrorists. When a soldier is taken prisoner by Palestinians, his immediate release is demanded. When Palestinians are forced to relinquish even a small part of their rights, they are forced to make more concessions. Whenever the Palestinians demand their rights, they are asked first to recognize the entity that was created on their land.

The occupying Power is treated like a State above the law. Everything that Israel does against the Palestinian people on their land is considered by its major Power supporters as acts of self-defence and are thus justified. The bombing of homes, the murder of scores of children, older persons and women inside their homes, the dismemberment of Palestinian land, the division of families under the pretext of self-defence and counter-terrorism, the burning of fruit orchards, confiscation of lands to establish links between settlements, demolition of homes because they were built without the permission of the occupying Power, detainment of elected Government officials on the pretext that they are terrorists — these are all justifications advanced by a superpower that claims to be peace-loving, to want to follow international law and to want peace in the region, yet its actions prove the opposite.

The tragedy of the Palestinian people is indescribable. Israeli terrorism in the occupied territories has exceeded all limits. From 1967, until the present, 700,000 Palestinians have been imprisoned by the occupation forces. Of those, 10,000 remain in Israeli prisons, including 4,000 children, 500 women and a large number of Palestinian officials. The heinous massacre perpetrated by the occupying forces in Beit Hanoun on 8 November 2006 is another proof of continued Israeli terrorism. This can be merely added to the list of other massacres in Deir Yassin, Kafr Qassim, Sabra and Shatila and Jenin. Israeli forces have defied the international community, obstructed all international resolutions, scorned international law, committed indescribable violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories and prevented fact-finding missions from going to Palestine.

We call on State protectors of the Israeli entity to end their double standard and to allow the international community to deal justly with the Palestinian question and to allow the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights — the right to return, to self-determination and to establish an independent State on their entire national territory.

We wonder what the situation in the world would be like if these double standards that deny the Palestinians their legitimate rights to combat the Israeli occupation were applied. Each just struggle is described as terrorism and the strugglers are labelled terrorists and Israeli genocide as self-defence. We wonder what would have happened if those double standards were applied to Europe? Would the Resistance and nationalist fighters had been called terrorists? What would be the situation if these criteria were applied to African and Asian peoples fighting against colonialism and racism? What would the situation be throughout the world if the leaders of all resistance movements and fighters were called terrorists? What if we had allowed the occupying

Powers to eliminate them? How would the situation have been worldwide? And would we have been able to meet here in this very Hall as independent States and as free peoples? Would this Organization have even been born if we had, in fact, denied people their just right to fight occupation and colonialism?

Past years have proved the failure of all efforts to find a solution to the question of Palestine because of the intransigence of the Israelis and their disregard for international law, and thanks to the protection that they enjoy from a number of States that are permanent members of the Security Council. Most of the United Nations membership have the feeling that the so-called peace process based on the Road Map is dead. There is no further hope that we can achieve a sustainable solution, except through a radical solution that would guarantee the rights of all.

This solution has been repeatedly proposed by the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. We propose the return of all Palestinian refugees to their lands, as well as the establishment of a democratic State on the historical land of Palestine, where Arabs and Jews would live on an equal footing, just as what happened in South Africa, where blacks and whites have coexisted after decades of conflict and bloodshed.

The question of Palestine is central to the conflict in the Middle East. There is no doubt that, among other things, it has resulted in the occupation of the Syrian Golan and of a part of Lebanon, and to the occupation and destruction of Iraq.

It is time, therefore, for United Nations members to join efforts — in fact, to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions on the Golan and to return it unconditionally to Syria, and to ensure the withdrawal of the Israeli occupier from Sheba'a Farms and return them to Lebanon.

We must not forget that the occupation of Iraq has become another problem to be added to the other problems of the region, one that can only worsen day after day. Therefore, we express our concern and our sadness at the possibility of a civil war in that brotherly country. We cannot ignore this possibility, and the responsibility for that lies with the occupying Power. We think the Iraqi catastrophe will not end as long as the occupier is there, fuelling conflicts and nurturing sectarianism among the people of Iraq. The United Nations, along with the Arab League, must act together to find a solution to the Iraqi problem, through which all Iraqis enjoy their right to peace and security within a unified, democratic Iraq that has full sovereignty, without foreign military bases and forces.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 14 for this meeting.

The representative of the United States of America has asked to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Ross (United States of America) (*spoke in Arabic*): We have just listened to the observer of the delegation of Palestine. According to the Palestinian interpretation of the situation, the only action necessary for fulfilling their desire for peace is for Israel and the United States to change their policies.

It would have been better had the representative of Palestine devoted the time allocated to him to explain the concrete steps that the Palestinian Authority could take to revive efforts aimed at achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

We are all well aware that all the peoples of the region, in particular the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, have been suffering from lack of peace for a very long time. We are also well aware that the continuation of the Arab-Israeli conflict has constituted a major threat to international peace and security for more than half a century.

For these reasons, the United States since the very beginning has been and continues to be in the vanguard of all the parties that are attempting to help the parties directly concerned to achieve peace, with the support and assistance of the overwhelming majority of the international community in general and the members of the Quartet in particular. The United States is committed to the continuation of those efforts. The current visit by our Secretary of State to the region is additional proof of that commitment.

As regards the Israelis and the Palestinians, our objective is clear and has been stated by President Bush on more than one occasion. We would like to see a solution based on the vision of two States, living side by side, in peace, harmony and security.

As for the two remaining tracks of the peace process, the United States continues to be committed to the objective of the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive solution based on the principles and the terms of reference agreed to at the Madrid Conference, including the principle of land for peace.

The path to the achievement of those objectives involves quiet and dispassionate political and diplomatic action, not unbalanced statements and resolutions that hinder the actions required. Therefore, the positions adopted by the United States in the United Nations and in other forums and venues reflect its genuine and sincere assessment of the proposed texts and steps — that is, whether such texts and steps will facilitate or complicate the creation of an atmosphere conducive to negotiations and to putting an end to the suffering of the peoples of the region as a whole.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I call on the observer of Palestine, who wishes to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to draw the attention of the representative of the United States to the fact that the Palestinian position on the peace process is crystal-clear and well known. That position has been expressed repeatedly by President Mahmoud Abbas, including yesterday, at his meeting in Jericho with the United States Secretary of State, Ms. Condoleezza Rice.

Our position is very clear: we are ready to engage in final status negotiations immediately and unconditionally, as stated by President Mahmoud Abbas prior to the most recent Palestinian elections. Following those elections, he has continued to reiterate that position daily.

As regards the Palestinian initiative of arranging the ceasefire that was successfully organized by President Mahmoud Abbas more than 18 months ago with all Palestinian parties and that was repeatedly violated by Israel, President Abbas has for the second time succeeded in establishing a ceasefire, and, this time, Israel has responded positively to it. We believe that if the ceasefire is extended to the West Bank — namely the remainder of the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem — that would constitute a step towards peace on which we can build. I believe that the representative of the United States is fully aware of this. Our position is very clear.

I personally read out a message from President Abbas yesterday morning at the start of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, on 29 November. In that message, President Abbas set out very clearly the strategic position of Palestine aimed at achieving peace. The problem does not lie with us; it lies with the Israeli party, which to date has made no serious progress towards peace. We all are well aware of the oft-expressed Israeli position, before and after the Palestinian elections, stating that there is no Palestinian partner. But there is a Palestinian partner, and that partner is the Palestinian people as represented by their leader Mahmoud Abbas.

If the Israelis are serious about progress towards peace, and are not taking steps that are merely tactical, the road is clearly mapped and the bases for such a peace are well known. Indeed, they are contained in the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and of the General Assembly. They are also reflected in the Arab Peace Initiative and in the Road Map, which was adopted by the Security Council in its resolution 1515 (2003). There is international consensus on the validity of those bases.

What is lacking is the will to make progress towards that goal. We, the Palestinian people and leadership, are the ones that yearn most for the restoration of peace. We thank the United Nations for its unswerving support and ask that it help us to create an atmosphere conducive to that end. The only Power that does not wish to proceed in this direction is Israel. It does not wish to abide by the will of the international community or to implement the resolutions to which I have just referred, which provide a solid foundation for the establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

In that regard, the position taken by the Arab nation as a whole at the 2002 Beirut Summit was a historic opportunity, which must be seized by all those who yearn for peace. The common Arab position states that Israel must completely and fully withdraw from all territories occupied since 1967 — not only the Palestinian territories, but also the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the south — in return for full normalization of relations with Israel and a comprehensive peace. This is a historic opportunity, and all those who love and yearn for peace must seize it in order to bring about a just, lasting, comprehensive and inclusive peace —

peace not only between Palestinians and Israelis but also between the Arab parties and Israel.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform members that draft resolutions A/61/L.31 through A/61/L.34 will be considered immediately following the debate on item 13 of the agenda, entitled "The situation in the Middle East".

Agenda item 13

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/61/298 and A/61/355)

Draft resolutions (A/61/L.35 and A/61/L.36)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I give the floor to the representative of Egypt to introduce draft resolutions A/61/L.35 and A/61/L.36.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We meet today to consider the agenda item 13 entitled, "The situation in the Middle East", which deals with the state of conflict and tension in that hot region over the past decades as the result of the continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories, which has led to a protracted state of regional and international insecurity and instability. The time has come to seriously address the situation in our region, particularly in light of the reiteration by the Arab parties of their commitment to a just and comprehensive peace, as reflected in the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and the special ministerial session of the Security Council on 21 September 2006.

Following the proven failure of military and unilateral solutions, as happened in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip, and which resulted only in further violence and destruction, the situation now requires action by the international community to expedite the resumption of negotiations in order to achieve a just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In that context and in expression of its rejection of the continuing Israeli occupation, the General Assembly annually adopts, under the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East", two resolutions of great importance. The first, deals with Jerusalem. All General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, since the adoption of the partition resolution of 1947 (resolution 181 (II)), have confirmed the necessity of maintaining Jerusalem's special status, as well as the illegitimacy of any measures undertaken by consecutive Israeli Governments to alter that status before the conclusion of final status negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis.

The second resolution deals with the occupied Syrian Golan and confirms the will and determination of the international community to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Syrian territory and to get Israel to withdraw fully from the Golan Heights to the borders of 4 June 1967.

Undoubtedly, reaching a final settlement can be founded on realizing a two-State solution and updating the Road Map to reflect a set of definite steps and a specific timetable that takes into consideration the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and the other relevant components of the peace process. Israel's withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, the Sheba'a Farms and the Golan Heights, will enable the attainment of a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East, in a context that will ensure the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the borders of 1967 and the establishment of normal relations among all States of the region.

However, achieving this depends to a large extent, on Israel's commitment to achieving peace. Israel must cease all of its policies and practices that contradict and thus jeopardize the peace process. It must show good faith on all tracks by ceasing its extrajudicial killings, blockades and targeting of civilians, as well as by releasing all prisoners and ameliorating of the humanitarian situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as strengthening new confidence-building measures.

In that context, we reiterate our satisfaction with the agreement between the Palestinians and Israelis to honour the ceasefire and cease hostilities, as well as the announcement by Israel's Prime Minister of his readiness to achieve peace with the Palestinians. We also reaffirm the importance of taking mutual steps to break the current stalemate and provide the appropriate environment in order to regain confidence, by resuming negotiations, arranging the release of the abducted Israeli soldiers and the return of Palestinian prisoners, including officials and members of the Legislative Council who have been detained by Israel.

We also look forward to more serious engagement by the relevant international Powers, especially the Quartet, in efforts to achieve a just and

comprehensive peace and to commence serious negotiations between the different parties to achieve the full withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and Sheba'a Farms. In that regard, we must acknowledge the positive initiatives of some countries, such as the joint Spanish, French and Italian initiative, in that regard. The end of the occupation must be comprehensive and complete, and must result from direct negotiations on all tracks free from attempts to maintain the status quo or impose a settlement by force, which would only lead to further deterioration of the situation in the region.

I wish to present to the General Assembly today two draft resolutions under agenda item 13, entitled "The situation in the Middle East". The first draft resolution, entitled "Jerusalem", is contained in A/61/L.35 and is co-sponsored by the 30 countries listed in the document. The second draft resolution, entitled "The Syrian Golan", contained in A/61/L.36, is co-sponsored by the 31 States listed in the document.

The first draft resolution reaffirms that the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions remain the main terms of reference for the special status of Jerusalem and confirms the renunciation and repudiation of all legislative and administrative measures and actions undertaken by Israel — the occupying Power — aimed at altering the status of Jerusalem. Moreover, the draft resolution confirms that any just and comprehensive solution to the question of Jerusalem must take into consideration the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and the Israeli sides, and must include provisions on international guarantees ensuring the freedom of belief and religion to its inhabitants. The draft resolution also welcomes the decision of a number of States to withdraw their diplomatic missions from Jerusalem, in compliance with Security Council resolution 478 (1980).

The second draft resolution deals with the occupied Syrian Golan. It reaffirms Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and highlights Israel's continued non-compliance with that resolution. It also confirms the applicability of The Hague Convention of 1907 and the Geneva Conventions of 1949 to the Syrian territory occupied since 1967 and the illegitimacy of the decision to apply Israeli law to that territory and the settlement operations there. The draft resolution also renews calls upon Israel to withdraw from the Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, to resume peace negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, and to ensure respect for commitments reached in previous negotiations.

The sponsors of the two draft resolutions believe that the time has come for the international community to address the Middle East from a comprehensive perspective. The people of the region have suffered from the scourge of war and aggression. They aspire to achieve peace, stability and development. That cannot be achieved without the international will to push towards the resumption of peace negotiations on all tracks, with a view to achieving full Israeli withdrawal from all of the Arab territories occupied since 1967 and based on the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map, the Madrid terms of reference and the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Proceeding from that, the sponsors look forward to a favourable vote by all members of the General Assembly on the two draft resolutions.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.